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SUBJECT: MINUSTAH'S POLITICAL ASSESSMENT: STABLE BUT WITH RISKS AHEAD

¶1. (SBU) On February 23 Poloff met with MINUSTAH Political Office Director Lizbeth Cullity to review MINUSTAH's assessment of the post-quake political situation. Cullity was optimistic for political stability in the short term, with President Preval receiving support from a majority of the Senate and with opposition in the lower chamber too indifferent or disorganized to challenge him. Cullity argued that the big challenge for Preval in the months to come will be managing relief efforts while keeping displaced and unemployed residents from resorting to violence if their needs or expectations are not met. A continuing challenge to the GOH, said Cullity, is the prospect of Preval opponents taking advantage of public dissatisfaction to organize protests, weaken the GOH, and seek concessions (patronage and, ultimately, access to and control of funds).

Preparations for the Donors Conference

¶2. (SBU) Cullity noted that Preval is working to build a consensus on reconstruction and governance spending priorities among Haitian stakeholders before the international donors conference on March 31. Preval advised MINUSTAH he will be meeting separately with stake holders (within the banking, manufacturing and political sectors, for example) before the 31st Also in preparation for the donors conference, MINUSTAH will conduct a series of 145 focus groups (10 persons each) throughout the country to measure citizens' views on reconstruction efforts and priorities. Preval told MINUSTAH his key focus will remain economic development, job creation, holding elections, and continuing to push constitutional reform. With respect to the latter priority, Preval told MINUSTAH he will focus on proposals to eliminate the dual citizenship ban, revise the election schedule to a five-year cycle, and strengthen the powers of the president.

Comment

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT: We agree with MINUSTAH's assessment that prospects for short-term stability are good. As aid continues to arrive in Haiti in the months to come, Preval's key challenge will be to ensure that Haitian quake victims continue to see aid as impartial, fair, and administered both by the international community and the GOH in a transparent manner.

¶4. (U) Minimize considered.  
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